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UNCLAS SANAA 000222

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: YEMENI WOMEN PROTEST DANISH PORTRAYAL OF PROPHET MOHAMMED

1. On February 1, approximately 5000 veiled women marched from Sanaa's Airport Road to the U.N. headquarters, protesting the recent publication of caricatures of the prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper. The women arrived in buses, and were organized by the Saleh Foundation, a charity run by one of President Saleh's daughters. The women were recruited by SMS text messages on cell phones, and carried banners critical of the Danish Government and calling for a boycott of Danish goods. A number of major supermarkets in Sanaa voluntarily pulled Danish goods from their shelves, including butter, milk, and baby formula. There was no visible anti-American sentiment.

2. These and other protests continued despite the January 31 apology on al-Jazeera of the Danish cartoonist and the newspaper, Jyllands-Posten. Stefania Bork, Senior Media Advisor for the Yemeni-Danish Partnership Programme (a technical office intended to precede an embassy), said that a number of her Yemeni employees were harassed by neighbors for working with the Danish government. The Danish technical office closed indefinitely for security reasons. Bork feared that these events would harm the cause of press freedom in Yemen, allowing opponents to dismiss reforms by pointing to the excesses of Western liberties. Several Yemenis at the demonstrations told Poloff that they did not see any contradiction between the protests and support for freedom of the press. It is the job of the press to be critical of political leaders, they said, not of the prophets.
Khoury